

## Restoring Armour and Swords – Contrasting Viewpoints

### Part B: Swords

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**Part A** of this series considered the restoration / conservation of armour. It was established that there are different attitudes towards restoring swords and antiques in general among occidental (European and American) collectors, museum curators and Japanese specialists in armour and swords.

The aim of **Part B** is to focus on the restoration / conservation practices as applied to swords.

Until quite recently there was a complete lack of understanding among specialists of antiquities in the West as to the appropriate appearance of an antique Japanese sword. According to Anne Gilbert, it is important to look for “marks of hand forging” in a Japanese sword; she writes:

“Do you carefully examine the sword blade itself for marks of hand forging? Any early piece should be hand-forged.” (Gilbert (1978), page 84)

Concerning *koshirae* (mounts), she advises that one should, for example examine if the handle “might have been ivory, but now is wood with an ‘antiqued’ finish.”

Harold Peterson writes that

“oxidation or patination is one of the first and most important clues that a trained curator or collector should check.” (Peterson (1975), page 56)

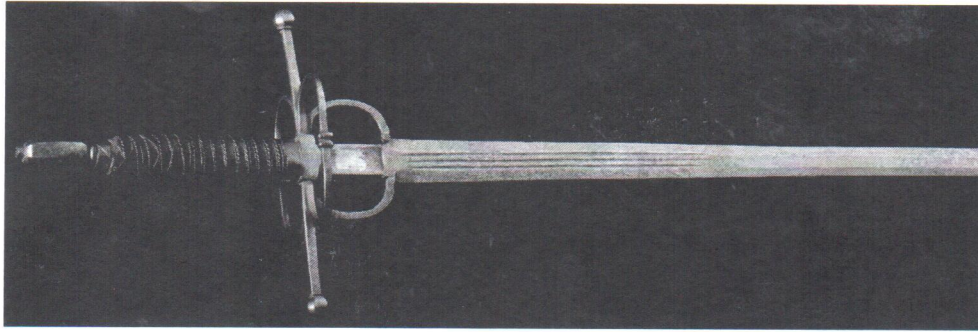
These approaches may apply to occidental swords and guns but not to an old polished Japanese sword. Consideration will be given later in this discussion to the importance of the state of oxidation in the condition of European swords.

With Japanese swords, the attitude in the UK to refurbishment has an important precedent. A few years ago, the British Museum obtained sponsorship to have 100 swords in its Japanese collection sent to Japan for polishing. (Harris (2004)). When the swords were returned, not only had they been polished, but those with damaged hilt bindings had been re-bound; in addition, some had their scabbards repaired.

Due to the nature of European armour and swords, restoration of those pieces required much heavier intervention than Japanese pieces. Two cases of restoration of European swords ultimately resulted in the first case, referred to today as a **composite sword**.

Figure 1 shows a **cut and thrust sword** composed of old parts; this style was typical circa 1550. The description which follows is provided by an unnamed expert:

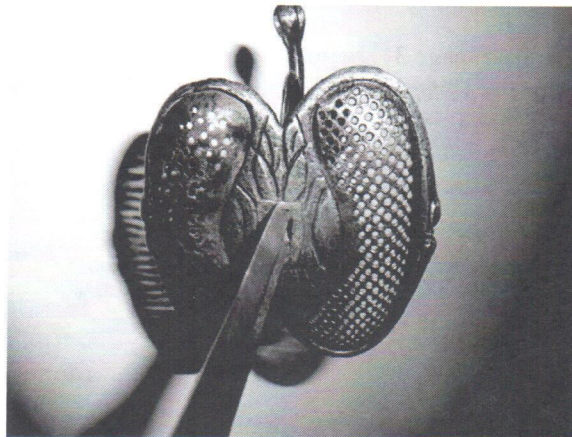
“Judging by the etchings on the blade, I’d say that it was made in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for some sort of cavalry broadsword. But the shape of the ricasso implies that the blade was intended for a sword with hilt with several parrying rings and a more complicated guard than you will find normally on cavalry broadswords. It is possible that the blade was made for a Spanish sword. The other parts come from different eras—the crosspiece might be 19<sup>th</sup> century, the grip too and the pommel is 17<sup>th</sup> century.”



**Figure 1** Hermann Historica Auctioneers, Munich

In addition, although the pommel may be 16<sup>th</sup> century, it is considered weak and feeble and the rear and front arms are too square in section. On a real hilt, the bars would be forged and taper elegantly. This kind of restoration results in a composite sword and should be avoided.

The sword shown in Figure 2 is an example of the result of a different process of restoration performed on a transitional rapier (German, circa 1690). Only the damaged portion of the hilt was restored. The finished product shown in Figure 2 is more acceptable than the example displayed previously in Figure 1. The left shell of the guard on the sword in Figure 2 was damaged or lost and was replaced. The metal of the new shell is a fine match to the older shell; it is clear that the restored shell is in perfect condition, while the older, original shell is rather dented. The ongoing dilemma as to whether the original shell should also be restored to an undamaged condition is moot, since the sword was expertly restored in England by an unknown restorer.



**Figure 2** Transitional rapier. The left shell of the guard was expertly restored.

It is not surprising that there are differences of attitude towards restoration among American and European collectors. These differences of attitude and ensuing actions most often reflect personal taste, preferences and philosophy as relates to how imperfections in their property should be treated. A closer examination of the variety of attitudes in this sphere will be presented in a later part of this article.



In contrast, there may be an expectation that museum restorers adopt a somewhat standardized approach to the question of restoration; consequently it does come as a surprise when there are significant differences of attitude among museum restorers. One such notable example is highlighted by W. Phyr et al. (Phyr (2002)). On page 23 of this publication, a very beautiful transitional rapier belonging to the Metropolitan Museum of Arts is described. At the end of the description, the author states that:

“When acquired, this sword lacked its grip. The present one, formed of fourteen alternating strands of braids, twisted, and plain copper wire or ribbon over a wooden core, was masterfully fabricated by the Museum’s armourer, the late Robert M. Carroll, who copied the genuine grip on a contemporary Dutch rapier in the Metropolitan collection.”

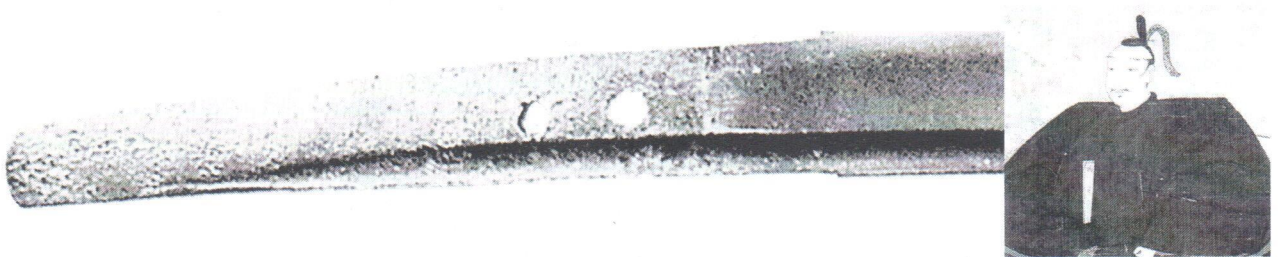
This sentence is a direct contradiction to the attitude described by Schmueker (2007) and referenced in Part A. (See URL - <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/26552>)

Finally, Harold L. Peterson (Peterson (1975) page 58) considers the examination of patination very important; for him, one axiom is that:

“...[what] you should always bear in mind about oxidation is that an object made of two or more pieces of the same metal will normally patinate at the same rate...”

He then describes the case of a Luristan bronze dagger that had a difference in colour between the hilt and the blade. In Peterson’s opinion, the collector “should have rejected it just as instantly”, but he did not and ultimately, within a few months, had to move the dagger from his bronze collection to his fake collection. The patination on Japanese swords is only important in the *nakago* (tang) of the blade and should be examined, but very often differences of patination colour are not reflective of age but due to *machi okuri* (lengthening the tang by shortening the cutting edge) or *o suriage* (greatly shortening the tang).

Figure 3 below is taken from Ineda ((nd) page 31, bottom figure). The differences in patination on the *nakago* are clearly visible. The sword is a *Mei Sho* (famous commander) and a *Mei To* (named sword).



**Figure 3** *Mei Sho* and *Mei To* (Ineda (nd) page 31) The *Mei Sho* is Gamō Ujisato (1556-1595). The *Mei To* is Aizu Masamune.

When a Japanese sword is acquired as part of a collection, its preliminary condition may demand that some treatment be applied. The four cases presented below highlight common problems and describe the

course of action chosen for the individual case. The discussion accompanying each example includes arguments under consideration, both for and against restoration.

### Case 1: Rusting, Pitting or Both

Despite the temptation to polish a sword which has rust or pitting, this solution should be chosen with caution. The condition becomes even more serious when the sword is pitted with rust. Choosing to polish the sword rather than leaving it alone could result in a forging flaw being revealed.

According to Francis Boyd (2007), a sword was sent to Japan for restoration. It had deep pitting (and/or forging flaws or a very thin outer skin). To remove the pitting, the sword was polished. Rather than correcting the original problem, large portions of the outside steel were lost. In Boyd's words:

"I was recently shown such a blade in exactly this state. It had a brand new, **high quality polish** [editorial emphasis] from Japan, and it was signed by a well thought-of maker with whom I was familiar. I could see a clear delineation between the core and skin running all the way down the *shinogi-ji* area on both sides. No matter how good the *Mei*, the sword was dead. I do not know whether or not to fault the polisher on the issue of conservation as I did not see the sword before it was polished. Obviously the polisher did not think highly of the man who submitted the blade for polish as he would know by the first or second stone that the skin was gone and should have communicated this before he went any further on the work. Who knows, perhaps he did and was told to continue?"

The dilemma here is a common one and invites numerous opinions; a sampling of three is offered below.

#### *Opinion 1:*

Francis Boyd's opinion, based on the rest of his article, stated: "The sword was dead" because he was considering its use as a weapon. The defect he saw affected the structure of the sword; however, regarding the sword as an art object may justify the decision to restore the sword.

#### *Opinion 2:*

This kind of restoration is dangerous, but may have been chosen by a collector who wished to have a sword by that smith and believed the sword polishing would increase its value. Many collectors do not want swords with this kind of defect. Another question which arises is whether or not swords with this kind of defect, despite their origins, should be awarded papers from Japanese *shinsa* teams.

#### *Opinion 3:*

As there are compelling points of view on both sides of the question, the debate is likely to continue. The European stance is that this restoration should be avoided, along with the suggestion that swords like this could be used in a museum setting in the future to illustrate the technique of Japanese sword manufacture. Boyd (2007) disagreed and explained that there are many swords by this well thought-of maker to provide better examples for appreciation of his artistic skill. Boyd believed that there was no need to restore the blade as it was done. Not only did the restoration "kill" the sword, it also resulted in the loss of history.



Also, with other better examples of the artisan's work, a pitted sword should not be presented as an example of a Japanese sword.

Since the risks are great, modern polishers often refuse to polish blades in poor condition. Mr. Tsuruta Kazushige of Aoi Arts, referred to one such sword on his website:

"I was very surprised about the condition of the blade which was rust all over the blade and deep rust many places...Most polishers will refuse instantly for polishing. So these swords will be ruin...Please pray for us that there are no *hagire* or rough parts."

In spite of the caution displayed by many modern polishers, the sword cited by Mr. Tsuruta Kazushige above was carefully polished and the results were very successful. At the outset, it was not possible to know whether *hagire*, *shintetsu* (core steel or rough parts) or other defects would appear. An ideal solution would be to devise an effective method of cleaning the blade which would determine if there are places where the rust is too deep. Once these problem areas are identified, it would be possible to do a partial polish and leave the problem area(s) alone.

### Case 2: Fatal Flaws vs. Non-Fatal Flaws

A summary of flaws found in Japanese swords appeared in a pamphlet by Hawley (1973). In his article, Lloyd Fleming (2012) expanded on this same theme, providing photographs to illustrate some the flaws (forge flaws). In partial agreement with Hawley's earlier work, Fleming went on to further classify the flaws in one of two categories: **fatal** or **non-fatal**. In his words:

"A flaw in a sword blade can refer to two things: a flaw generated as a consequence of manufacture, or a flaw caused by degradation from use and subsequent repair."

(Note that Fleming does not consider a flaw due to poor conservation which resulted in pitting by rust, perhaps because swords in this condition are becoming rare.) He continues:

"Many blades have flaws of some kind, some designated as 'Fatal Flaw' in cases where the use of the blade in battle will likely result in a failed blade. A non-fatal flaw only compromises the appearance of the blade without rendering it unfit for service."

The flaws which result from forging can be restored by special techniques, as described in an article by Leon Kapp (1993). These flaws usually do not compromise the structure of the sword and can therefore be identified as non-fatal. They can be restored without modifying the *sugata* (shape) of the blade (Leon Knapp (1993)). It is not clear whether this kind of restoration would be acceptable to European curators and restorers. A talented Japanese restorer can produce virtually invisible work, while European restorers prefer that restored parts be clearly visible and, thus, easily identifiable.

Opinions as regards this issue remain divided. Those who are in favour of invisible repairs feel that visible repairs would make the sword ugly and would rather leave the flaw visible.

Examples of fatal flaws include:

- *Hagire*: a crack perpendicular to the temper-line
- *Karasaguchi*: a crack in the shape of a crow's beak that touches the edge of the *boshi* (*A Dictionary of Japanese Sword Terms*, Page 8)
- Missing sections along the *hamon* (temper-line)

Sometimes the *hagire* can be repaired by reducing the *mihaba* (sword width); this may be done by removing steel from the *ha* (cutting edge). According to Fleming (2012):

“this was valid at one time when the sword was put to use in conflict, as once the *hagire* is removed, if the *hamon* has not been breached, the blade is viable as a weapon again.”

Unfortunately, this kind of repair will inevitably change the *sugata* (shape) of the blade. Since the *hamon* is under compression, removing part of it may even cause the blade to deform and result in *uchi-zori* (reverse curvature). A comprehensive discussion of this result is included in a book by Nakahara (2010).

While the *hamon* cannot be fixed without distorting the blade, it is possible for *karasaguchi* and broken tips to be mended by a polisher without distorting much of the *sugata* of the blade. The only way to correct serious breaks is to re-temper the sword. This sword would then be classified as a *saiha* (re-tempered) blade.

When there is so much pre-occupation with flaws, there is inherent danger in overlooking the value in the other existing characteristics of the sword. One such situation is exemplified in the case of a very early *tanto* signed *Yoshimitsu* which is housed in a very beautiful *koshirae*. The sword itself has been polished so many times that there is no *hamon* remaining and yet the *tanto* is done with an ebony hilt, elaborately carved all over with chrysanthemums and a brocade-covered scabbard. In spite of its less than perfect condition, whoever owned the sword believed it to be sufficiently precious to mount it in an expensive *koshirae*.

Similarly, there is also a *wakizashi* which is a genuine *naginata naoshi* from what must have been an enormous original, possibly from the *Kamakura* period, since both the blade and tang seem to have been cut from that part of the original blade above the grooves. As the blade must have swelled in width at the original *monouchi*, it was necessary to reduce the width during conversion, with the resultant loss of about 2” – 3” of *hamon* in what is now the centre of the blade. Despite these changes, the altered sword was mounted and carried as a weapon. After its conversion, the sword still had a hardened point and *monouchi*, as well as a *hamon* towards the base of the blade; hence, it was considered fit for use.

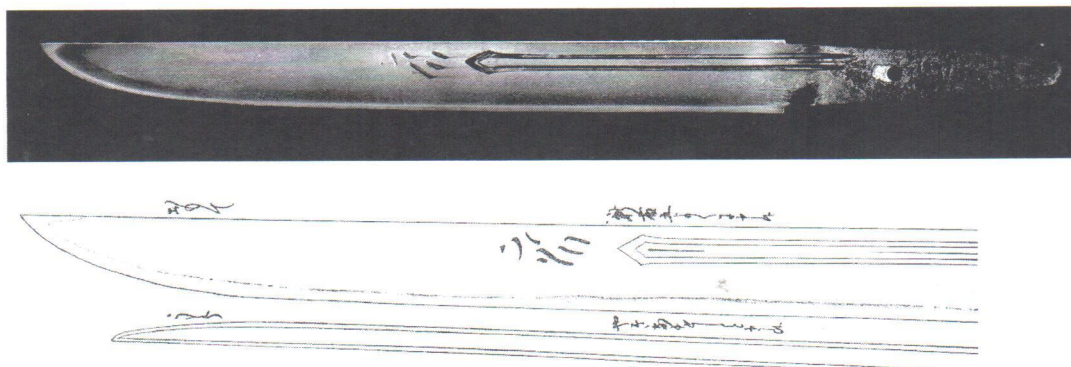
The Ikeda Masamune displayed in Figure 4 is a *Meibutsu* (Treasured Sword) which has fatal flaws. Specifically, the *mune machi* is gone, due to use, and there are chips on the edge and some grain openings.



Figure 4 Meibutsu, Ikeda Masamune (Ineda (nd), page 31, Top figure)



Figure 5 is an example taken from *Meibutsu – Treasured Japanese Swords – 2011* (Page 64-65). This *tanto* is attributed to Massamune and has significant gaps in its *hamon*; it is tired and over-polished. There is no famous owner of this *tanto*, yet it is designated as a *Kyoho Meibutsu*.



**Figure 5** *Meibutsu -Treasured Japanese Swords* page 64-65

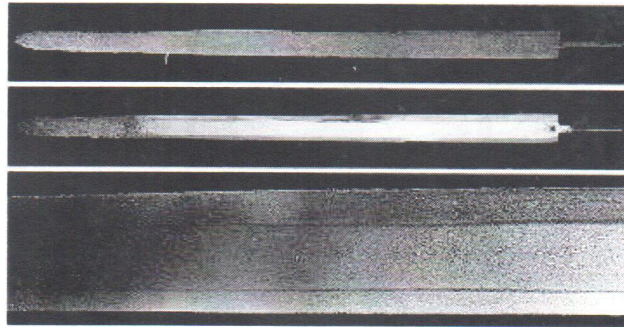
When confronted with an old European sword, it may become necessary to decide on the course of action needed and the ultimate goal of any restoration. If the aim of the treatment is to bring the object as close as possible to its original condition, this should not be attempted without a closer look.

It is not always immediately evident whether a sword has been polished at some point in its history, but this information may be important in deciding whether some old European swords should be polished. According to the literature examining several particular cases, at least some swords (medieval ones) were polished. One specific case described by Claude Blair (Blair (1959)) focuses on the sword of Sancho IV (1223-1248, King of Castile and Leon). Blair states:

“The broad blade has suffered somewhat from corrosion but in places retains its original mirror-bright polish.”

If it has already been established that the sword was polished previously, it is definitely understood that restoration must proceed with caution, to the level of the original polish. Special care must be taken not to “over-polish”, for fear of damaging the sword unintentionally. Alternately, the mere possibility that more polishing might endanger the sword’s condition could further support the school of thought which is against polishing old European swords.

An interesting experiment was undertaken by Stefan Maeder and described in an article in the *Token Bijutsu* (Maeder (2008)) in Japanese. He took a few old European swords to Japan and had them polished in the Japanese fashion. The swords polished in this way showed *hada* (grain), as is evident in Figure 6 below.



**Figure 6** This figure shows the *ji hada* in a Merovingian period blade (5<sup>th</sup> C to late 8<sup>th</sup> C)

European swords dating after 1200 C.E. do not have *hada* (Coutinho (2011), Appendix A and B); consequently, if polished, it would be *muji hada* (without pattern). The decision as to whether to polish such a blade depends on knowing if it was polished in its original state.

### **Case 3: Swords with the signature removed and *mumei* (unsigned) swords**

#### ***Koto* Swords**

*Koto* swords were produced in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century or earlier. In this group, swords with non-original or false signatures are very common. Since a sword with a false signature loses much of its value and is generally rejected when submitted for *shinsa*, it is a common practice to remove these signatures. Without a signature, a sword may get a paper and an attribution that will add monetary rather than artistic value to it. This procedure may be regarded as a partial restoration since the false signature is considered a blemish to the sword.

According to Nakahara (2013), this is an old habit and perfectly good signatures of less well-known masters were removed or altered in the hope that a particularly good sword made by a swordsmith of inconsistent talent might pass as one produced by a more respected swordsmith (one with more consistent results). In most cases, this has been done so that the sword appears as *suriage* (cut by shortening the blade, possibly with some signature showing); in such an instance, it may seem that the absence of a signature is justified. Nakahara (Nakahara (2010)) considers this forgery and points out that there are many ways to shorten the blade (if necessary for use) without removing the signature. (Any book on Japanese swords will include a guide to types of signature.)

The act of shortening a blade cannot be considered a restoration. According to Nakahara, if the signature is maintained, either *orikaeshi mei* (the cut portion with the signature is retained and folded over) or by *gaku mei* (the signature is removed and inset into the tang), the practice is acceptable. In expressing this view, Nakahara closely matches the European stance. Nakahara's opinions are highly controversial in Japan.

Removal of a signature which is genuine cannot be considered a restoration, since the blade was not *gimei*. Since this action is not performed to remove a blemish or improve the condition of the blade, this is not seen as a restoration.



In contrast, an interesting situation evolved in the case of a good sword signed *Soshu Ju Masamune*, however the signature did not resemble a true *Masamune* signature. For direction, the owner consulted a famous polisher and an expert in identifying swords. Both recommended removing the signature and submitting the blade to *shinsa*, since the blade and signature were recognized as coming from another well-known *Soshu* smith. In spite of this advice, the owner opted not to remove the signature. His follow-up research about the false signature was rewarded with the fortunate news that the blade was probably made by *Soshu ju Hiromasa*. Why *Hiromasa* signed the sword as *Soshu ju Masamune* in his characteristic manner remains a mystery. In looking for an explanation for *Hiromasa's* signature here, two possible circumstances come to mind:

1. This blade may have been made on request and *Hiromasa* was forced to sign *Masamune*, OR
2. *Hiromasa* thought the sword was so good that he decided to sign it *Masamune*.

*Hiromasa* could easily have cleared up the mystery by including the word *utushi* (in the style of) as part of the signature, but regrettably, he did not.

It may be argued that removing the signature results in the loss of part of the sword's history, regardless of the motivation.

A very similar situation with a different outcome is described in a recent post on Nihonto Message Board (NMB):

<http://www.militaria.co.za/nmb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=20971>

In this post, a long discussion about removal of signatures and *mumei* swords, Ron Hartmann (Ron STL) describes the following event:

“... examples in my collection. The first is a (now *mumei*) attributed to Hatakeda Morie. It carried the *mei* “Morie” when discovered by the previous owner, the *mei* was removed. [...] I find sad that the “*gimeï*” was removed.”

Another similar instance involves a *tanto* which was originally signed *Yoshimitsu*. In Japan, the owner had the “*mitsu*” character obscured and submitted the blade for *shinsa* where it was returned as a *Heianjo Yoshinori* blade. The full signature was removed subsequently (the blade had the wrong *jihada* for a *Yamashiro* blade) and resubmitted. On the second submission, the sword was attributed to *Moromitsu (Oei)*, which was much closer to the original *Yoshimitsu* signature designation.

In view of this experience, the advisability of removing a signature rather than leaving it as a historical record should be reconsidered. If no alteration is made to the signature, the blade would be attributed to the smith best determined by current knowledge.

Four possible reasons that a false or inaccurate signature may be added to a blade are as follows:

1. *For the purpose of deception and financial gain.* These are the most egregious. If this intent is clear and indisputable, this signature should be removed.
2. *To create a gift sword for presentation at various ceremonial presentations (as discussed in the NMB thread).* Potentially this was the case with the *Masamune tanto* mentioned above. In this case, it clearly was not a *Masamune* signature, but a well-cut one. As it was not intended to deceive anyone, there was no reason to remove it.

3. *The master smith of the blade had someone sign it for him.* There could be many reasons for this, but if the blade is attributed as his work or even the result of collaboration with his students, the signature bears some level of accuracy.
4. *The practice of producing copies of famous blades or blades in the likeness of a famous smith.* As long as the intent does not involve conscious deceit, it should remain as an example of “in the style of” or “a copy of” the original smith’s work. The *utushi* designation would easily accomplish this identification.

### ***Shinto and Shinshinto Swords***

*Shinto* and *Shinshinto* swords were made after the *Koto* period. The number of *mumei* swords take a dramatic spike in the *Shinto* period.

This simple statement does little to explain why such tactics were necessary and opens the field to speculation and possible hypotheses. By way of example, two possibilities which have been offered as explanation are:

- 1 Blades that were made by apprentices that were not considered good enough by their master were left without signatures.
- 2 Apprentices produced swords that their master would not consider good enough, but even these were too valuable to destroy in the face of the economic repercussions

In order to get a clearer picture of the historical events which contributed to the destruction of so many swords during the *Muromachi* era, the table below (Figure 7) touches on some of the important events during this period. Even though numbers are approximate, the enormous losses are unmistakable.

<u><b>Event</b></u>	<u><b>Timeline</b></u>	<u><b>Involvement</b></u>	<u><b>Consequences</b></u>
Sword hunt conducted by <i>Toyotomi Hideyoshi</i>	1588		Reduced the number of swords from the previous <i>Sengoku</i> period. The swords were destroyed allegedly to construct a huge statue of Buddha.
First Korean Invasion	1592	154,000 Japanese warriors	Many swords not confiscated in the sword hunt were destroyed in battle.
Second Korean Invasion	1597 after a brief truce	115,000 Japanese warriors	As in the First Korean Invasion. The two Korean campaigns are chronicled by Turnbull (Turnbull (2002), pages 240-241)  The Japanese gave up the invasion in 1598.
<i>Sekigahara</i> – One big campaign	1600	160,000 Japanese warriors	Chronicled by Bryant (Bryant (1991) Page 51)
<i>Osaka</i>	1614 -1615 Winter campaign	300,000 samurai	Chronicled by Turnbull (Turnbull (2006) Page 29)
<i>Osaka</i>	1614 -1615 Summer campaign	200,000 samurai	Chronicled by Turnbull (Turnbull (2006) Pages 64-65)



			This resulted in the formation of the <i>Tokugawa Shogunate</i> .
<i>Shimabara No Run</i> Rebellion		105,000 samurai against 37,000 Christians, in its last phase	Chronicled by Caldwell (Caldwell (1991))

**Figure 7:** Timeline of some events in which Japanese swords were lost and/or severely damaged

Even without comprehensive details of the military engagements and precise facts and figures, it is very clear that severe losses were suffered during the late *Muromachi* period. With so much turmoil, it is no surprise that the economy went through extremely serious crises during and after this time.

In the course of these events, many *Koto* swords were destroyed; consequently, there was a market for *Shinto mumei* swords. This type of *mumei* swords cannot be classified as restoration pieces, as nothing was altered. In some cases, as mentioned earlier, signatures were removed; however, this was done primarily to increase the value of the sword. With commerce as the primary motivator for this change, signature removal is nothing but simple fraud, most definitely not restoration.

While some signatures have been removed so effectively that they are essentially impossible to detect, there are also many well-made swords, mostly *Shinshinto* swords, which have improbable signatures from old masters. Dealing with this latter group of swords presents a difficult dilemma; examining two possible options does not reveal any easy solution.

- Option 1: Remove the dubious signature and consider this a restoration.
- Option 2: Leave the signature and give the sword a paper declaring that the signature was false. At the same time, make an attribution to the real maker. Unfortunately, at present this is not an option offered by any organization that has *shinsa*.

In each of the two examples which follow, a sword was submitted to a renowned expert for analysis.

In the first case, an *oshigata* was deemed to show signs of alteration. In his response, illustrated in Figure 8: Letter 1 below, the expert outlines the steps that were followed, in his opinion, to change the *kanji* *Tsugu* to *Tsuna*. The expert suggests that this was done, presumably in *Edo* times, to increase the *oshigata*'s commercial value. While it is possible to restore the old *kanji*, this course of action is not recommended, as making this alteration would result in a loss of the sword's history. Having the formal document from a recognized expert acknowledging the alteration is definitely preferable to restoring the piece or, worse yet, removing the signature and submitting the *oshigata* as *mumei* for *shinsa*.

Dear [REDACTED]

I have carefully examined the Tsunahiro signature in the oshigata making reference to our oshigata collection. The following is the conclusion I have reached after much deliberation.

Considering there is just one Tsunahiro in the Genroku era, the characteristics of the signature in your sword seem to indicate that the mei was originally signed Echizen-no-kuni Omi-no-kami TSUGUhiro. Since Tsunahiro had a greater name value, some one at a later date added chisel cuts to change the character reading TSUGU to look like TSUNA which are somewhat alike. The alteration can be done by adding a few strokes to the right part of the character. Tsuguhiro is a swordsmith belonging to the so-called Shimosaka school. Such a possibility is 99%.

If that is the case and if such sword is submitted to the Shinsa, we would give it the Hozonto designation indicating the signature is not the original but an altered one. Sometimes attempts are made to put it back to the original mei by expert hand, but the risk of damaging the the tang is quite large.

Sincerely yours,

Figure 8: Letter 1

In the second case, a sword signed *Oku Yamata no Kami Taira Ason Motohira* and dated *Kansei 9<sup>th</sup>* year (1797) was submitted to a different well-known expert. Figure 9: Letter 2 below illustrates his response.

July 8, 2008

[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you very much [REDACTED] I also very much enjoyed seeing your sword collection.

I have researched your MOTOHIRA and have found that it unfortunately is a forgery. However, the blade is very well made by him or his school. Please see enclosed OSHIGATA.

[REDACTED]

My best wishes,



**Figure 9: Letter 2**

Although the expert recognizes that the signature is *gimei*, he does go on record to attribute the work to *Motohira* or one of his students. Once again, this recognition of the sword's likely origins by a well-known and respected authority is a better option than removing the *gimei* signature and submitting the altered sword as *mumei*. It is fervently hoped that *shinsa* boards will adopt the practice exhibited here for swords with altered or false signatures in the future.

**Case 4: Swords polished incorrectly**

As the title suggests, the focus of this series of articles is the restoration of armour and swords, with particular emphasis in this section, Part B, on issues relating to swords.

Frequently, a sword owner opts to send the new acquisition for polishing, with the hope that this treatment will “refresh” and enhance its appearance. Whether the motivation behind this desire is for the collector's personal appreciation of the sword or to increase its value is secondary.

The cautionary tale offered as an example below began in just this way, but the series of mistakes which ensued resulted in a different outcome than was expected.

The sword in question had an old *Honami Ko-Fuda* (*Honami* appraisal certificate for swords of a value of less than 5 *mai*) attributing it to *Shitahara* School was sent for polish. Somewhere along the way, unfortunately, the *Ko-Fuda* was misplaced and, it is to be assumed, that by the time the sword reached the polisher, it was not available to act as a guideline for how the work was to proceed. As a result, the polisher opted to restore the sword according to his own personal preference and vision of beauty. Unfortunately, he failed to preserve the characteristics of the School's *jihada* (grain pattern) and even though the sword was polished well, the School's original *hada* (grain pattern) was obscured as a consequence. Ultimately, the impact of the change in the appearance of the *hada* became evident when the sword was submitted to *shinsa* and attributed to another School. The next course of action is rather problematic. As each round of polishing reduces the outer layer of the sword, caution must be exercised not to “over-polish” the sword to the point of damage. Often, in a case such as this one, another polish is out of the question. A possible next step is to apply a “touch-up” polish to bring out the *Shitahara* features more prominently.

The following suggestions are offered as reminders to collectors who are considering sending a **Japanese** sword to a polisher with the hope of “improving” the particular piece either through repair, enhancement or perhaps both.

1. *Gather information.* In spite of a variety of geographic locations, ages, particular favourites of swordsmiths, length of time collecting, size of collections, etc., the members of the sword-collecting community are united in their appreciation of the art and their enjoyment of discussion, examination and sharing of their knowledge. Thanks to the technology available today, distance and time-zones are not impediments to communication among collectors and it really has become a “small world”. Whether the seeker of advice is a novice collector or a more experienced one, communicating in this way with other collectors can help to establish some important criteria:
  - a. *How much restoration the sword merits:* Collectors acquire particular swords for a variety of reasons; they may be products of a favourite smith or School, intended to round out an existing collection or perhaps even an opportunity that was too good to ignore.

Inviting the opinion and impression of other collectors may be very positive in the long run. Another set of eyes may see additional features (good or bad) that were less evident on first glance; other bits and pieces of the sword's provenance or journey may be revealed. Ultimately, these factors may help to determine how much of an investment is warranted in the proposed restoration. When examining a Japanese sword, knowledgeable collectors will pay special attention to particular characteristics as aids to its identification. The more distinctive features present in the sword, the greater the likelihood of its authenticity and the stronger the argument for a higher level of polish. The characteristics under consideration may include:

- i. The shape of the blade.
    - ii. The temper line.
    - iii. The *mei* (signature) on the tang. When other characteristics are present, this will confirm the identity of a blade.
    - iv. The patina on the tang.
    - v. The *ana* (holes) in the tang. In older blades, these are punched rather than drilled.
    - vi. The thickness of the tang, as compared to the rest of the blade.
  - b. *The best polisher for the job*: Once again, this is an area in which the opportunity to learn from the sword-collecting community is a definite advantage. In a sense, sword polishers may be compared to the specialists in any profession. There are those who may be described as "general practitioners", who will perform an acceptable job, but are not up to the task of more specialized work. The more delicate the restoration required, the more important it is to choose the right person for the task. As pointed out earlier, the chance to "fix" a mistake may be very limited. Experienced collectors are invaluable resources and are often happy to offer advice. As a word of caution, however, some polishers are very busy and the waiting period until the work is completed may be lengthy.
2. *Educate oneself*. On the surface, this advice may be applied to any type of collecting, as each comes with its own body of knowledge and vocabulary.
  - a. *Names and descriptive terminology*. As applied to the practice of collecting Japanese swords, the acquisition of names and terminology is further complicated by transliterating Japanese *kanji* to their closest equivalent using the characters employed by the language of the collector's country of origin. Many such terms have already appeared throughout this and the previous articles, for example.
  - b. *Polishing techniques and descriptions*. With special reference to polishing techniques in the Japanese context, it is important for collector seeking a specific restorative treatment for a sword, familiarity with the names of particular procedures and the resulting effects are essential. The following link to Nihonto Message Board leads to an excellent overview and information forum on Japanese sword polishing terminology:  
<http://www.militaria.co.za/nmb/topic/12171-sashikomihadori/?hl=sashikomi>
3. *Communicate with the polisher/craftsman*. By the time the collector has reached the decision to submit the Japanese sword for polish, a number of preparations have already been set in motion, as outlined above. When deciding the best polisher for the job, it is most advisable to choose one who has been fully trained in Japan. Before the work begins, it is important to establish what steps will be followed and the expectations of both collector and polisher. Here are some suggestions of issues which may come under discussion.



- a. *The feasibility of opening a “window” in a sword blade.* In segment 1a. above (*How much restoration a sword merits*), the possible characteristics of a Japanese sword are presented as a “checklist” to help in determining whether the cost and time involved in a full polish are justified. When a significant number of indicators suggest that the sword may have potential value, a small section or “window” in the blade may be polished. The results will assist in discovering the quality of the blade and the subsequent level of polish needed. Opening the window works to the advantage of both collector and polisher; both may get a clearer picture of what a polish can achieve, with a smaller financial and time investment.
- b. *The style of polish.* The two predominant styles of polish applied to Japanese swords are *hadori / keisho* and *sashikomi*. It has become very difficult to find polishers who offer both styles; the *sashikomi* style of polish is less available.
  - i. *Hadori / keisho* These terms are essentially synonymous and describe the technique of emphasizing the *hamon* (temper line) of the blade. Often the polisher redefines the *hamon* line in a *Hadori* polish.
  - ii. *Sashikomi* This is an older style of polishing which brings out the *hataraki* more prominently and follows the original *hamon* line. While this may be the preferred style, it generally more time consuming and expensive.
- c. *Expectations when the polishing is completed.* This continues to be a difficult question without a definitive correct choice. There are those collectors who strive only to restore Japanese swords to their original condition. In this scenario, the polished sword appears as it did when it was “new” or unused. Other collectors seek to go beyond the original, utilitarian appearance and rather “enhance” the sword. In this latter case, there may be additional motivation in expecting that the “improved” sword may achieve a better result at *shinsa*. Of course, the polisher is placed in a difficult position with conflicting wishes to both please the client and maintain the integrity of the sword at the same time.

This series of articles is intended to inspire awareness of trends and the factors influencing collectors when faced with decisions in the care of their treasured artifacts. Collectors must remember that they are guardians of these artifacts for a relatively short time. With this privilege comes the responsibility of protecting the beauty and legacy of the skill that went into creating them. After all, when the time comes to pass them on to the next generation of collectors, it is hoped that these artifacts will still be able to stand as proud examples of their origins.

Special thanks are offered to **Sylvia Hennick** who used her considerable talents, time and effort to consolidate four voices into one voice that is clear and understandable.

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***Errata – Vol. 47, No. 3***

There were several errors in the printed Namban Article by James McElhinney

The last three sentences in the top paragraph on page 32 starting with "The subject of this unique tsuba is...."  
should follow the text on page 29 ending with "..., expressing the influence of European painting"

The second sentence on page 31 should read:

"It seems that the most popular, or perhaps commercially the most successful designs were water-dragon motifs employing openwork, carved from *Namban-tetsu*; iron imported from Dutch Indonesia."